

Chapter One

THE NOVELS - an overview

From 1921 Dark's short stories and verse, for which she often used the pseudonyms 'Patricia O'Rane', 'P. O'R', 'Henry Head', 'Andalusia', 'Jane Jones', 'D. E.', 'E. P. D'. and 'Nora Keelard', appeared in various magazines and newspapers. These included *The Bulletin*, *The Home*, *Stead's Review*, *Motoring News*, *Art in Australia*, *Australia (National Journal)*, *Australian Writers' Annual*, *Triad*, *The Australian Mercury*, *Ink*, *The Australian Woman's Mirror*, *The Muses' Magazine*, *The Spinner*, *Tales by Australians* and *Sydney Mail*. She also contributed travel and historical articles to journals and anthologies such as *Australia Week-end Book*, *The Writer*, *Walkabout*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *The Peaceful Army* and *This Land of Ours ... Australia*.¹

Dark finished her first novel, *Slow Dawning*, in 1923, although it was not published until 1932.² Later she rejected it,³ yet the work must be evaluated as an important part of her *oeuvre*, as in it she raised several significant and, for her, contentious issues. These were: the limited opportunities granted women in the professions; the difficulties inherent in modern marriage; single parenthood; and women's right to sexual freedom outside marriage. Set in Kawarra, a fictional yet representative small town in New South Wales, the main action took place between 1924 and 1926. With Dr. Valerie Spencer, the novelist illustrated the general prejudice with which professional women were generally regarded in those years. The young doctor had returned to her home town expecting to set up practice and to marry her first love, Jim Hunter. During the intervening years, however, they had lost touch, and he had become engaged to Kitty Ray, marrying her soon after Valerie's return. Convinced that the morals of a lady doctor must be suspect, and glad of an excuse to malign her, the town gossips linked Valerie with the philandering Dr. Hughes. At the same time Jim realised that he still

¹ I am indebted to Judith Clark and Barbara Brooks for adding several of Dark's pseudonyms and contributions to my own list.

² In the meantime, she used some of the content in a short story called 'Wind', *The Bulletin*, 21/1/1926, under the pseudonym of 'Patricia O'Rane'.

³ See Dark, letter to Nettie Palmer, dated 14/12/1933, Palmer Papers, NLA, 1/Box 6, Folder 57, in which she referred to 'my unspeakable *Slow Dawning*.'

See also Devanny, *Bird of Paradise*, *op. cit.*, where, referring to this novel, Dark said: 'That was the only time in my life when I wrote dishonestly ... I think that writing with the tongue in the cheek is asking for trouble. From every point of view it is a bad policy.'

loved Valerie, and, although she rebuffed him, their brief encounter caused more gossip, so that when Kitty contracted pneumonia and Valerie could not save her, the girl's mother accused her of deliberately causing the girl's death so that Jim would be free to marry her.

Meantime, Dr. Owen Heriot, an embittered ex-soldier, had set up a practice in competition with Valerie, and, gradually, admiration for her courage under duress replaced his original antipathy and developed into love. This allowed Dark to compare the youthful, 'romantic' love which Valerie had felt for Jim with Heriot's mature and supportive love for her. The novel was technically deft, although there was a failure in organic development in the presentation of Valerie's love for Heriot, with plot progressions so suddenly imposed that they distorted the novel's otherwise artistic shape and unity.

Dark's further development was made clear in her next work, *Prelude to Christopher*. In structure, content and expression, this was one of the most mature novels published in Australia up to that time,⁴ dealing as it did with the three main areas in which considerable progress was being made in the early decades of the twentieth century - technology, the biological sciences and psychology. The novelist focused on the period between 1910 and 1932, and the tone was one of ever-increasing emotional intensity as she analysed progressively the psychological crises which various social forces generated in the lives of a small, interrelated group of middle-class people. In revealing the dark side of the topical issue of eugenics, Dark explored the fate of the biologist, Linda Hamlin, who fascinated the eugenicist, Dr. Nigel Hendon, unaware as he was of the strain of homicidal madness in her family. After their marriage, admitting her guilt in keeping him ignorant of her

⁴ This novel won the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal in 1934, and was published in German (1937).

See C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia, Vol. VI, op. cit.*, p. 439: 'When he established Endeavour Press, P. R. Stephensen 'asked Eleanor Dark for a manuscript, sensing rightly she had something to say to Australians.'

See also C. Munro, *Wild Man of Letters, The Story of P. R. Stephensen*, Carlton, 1984, p. 142: 'Stephensen had in effect introduced two of the country's major novelists, Eleanor Dark [with *Prelude to Christopher*] and Xavier Herbert ... and if he published lightweight books in order to keep his ... fragile enterprise going, it was because of his faith in important writers such as Herbert and Dark.'

See also Croft, 'Responses to Modernism' *op. cit.*, p. 422. Croft described this work as 'one of the major novels written in Australia during the decade.'

heredity, she begged him to take her with him to the island where he planned to establish a colony populated by people of healthy stock. He reluctantly agreed, but, ruled as he was by reason, he insisted that they remain childless.

The utopian experiment had to be abandoned, and we met the couple many years later in a country town when Nigel, hospitalised after a car accident, was nursed by Kay, who loved him in a hero-worshipping way and indicated her willingness to bear for him the potentially healthy child he had always wanted. Linda became increasingly disturbed during Nigel's absence, and the climax of the novel occurred in the scene when Nigel's mother confronted her daughter-in-law with town gossip linking her with another doctor. Flying into a murderous rage, Linda attacked the elderly woman, and it was only Kay's arrival and physical intervention which quietened her.

Convinced that she was losing hold of her sanity, Linda made it clear to Kay that she intended to kill herself, warning her, however, not to tell Nigel. The nurse was appalled, but she knew that his wife's death would give her the chance of a shared life with him. The cynical Linda enjoyed Kay's dilemma. Convinced that the girl would not warn him, she relished the thought that this secrecy must surely poison Kay's future with the knowledge that she was no better than a conniver in the suicide. Establishing the credibility of a character like Linda, whose bizarre behaviour was over-charged with tension and potentially melodramatic, was a considerable feat for the novelist. By balancing her outrageousness with her frightening vulnerability, however, Dark succeeded in enlisting her readers' sympathy for someone who was trapped in an untenable yet conceivable situation.

With *Return to Coolami*⁵ Dark conducted, with some psychological expertise, an Ibsenesque exploration into the behaviour of a small, middle-class group of Australians at a time of personal change. Set in the early

⁵ *Return to Coolami* won the Australian Literature Gold Medal in 1936.

Dark somewhat dismissively called this novel a 'love story with a Happy Ending' in a letter to Nettie Palmer dated 16/5/1936, Palmer Papers, NLA, MSS 1174/1/4438. See also Dark, letter to Miles Franklin dated 19/9/[1936?], M. Franklin Papers, ML MSS 3641, in which, with regard to this novel, Dark wrote, 'Anything less highbrow could hardly be imagined!'

1930s, the plot concerned Bret Maclean, who prided himself on being, above all, a reasonable man, and Susan Drew, a 'new woman' who flouted society's double sexual standard by having an affair with Bret's younger brother, Jim. When Jim was fatally injured in a car accident, Bret promised to look after Susan and protect the interests of their expected child. For some time Susan had secretly loved Bret, but he regarded her with contempt and dislike, and when he proposed marriage as a way of carrying out his promise, he made it clear that he was thinking only of the child's welfare. The action was complicated when the baby died a few days after birth, so that the circumstances which had made their marriage necessary had changed, and Susan insisted on returning to her parents' home. Dark used the wealthy, middle-aged parents, Tom and Millicent Drew, to introduce as a theme the futility of equating material well-being with personal happiness, and to make the point that age is no excuse for abandoning the adventurous life journey. The novel began at the point where Bret, gradually learning to respect Susan's courage and sense of humour, had persuaded her to return to Coolami. When, on the journey back with Tom and Millicent, the car skidded to a cliff-edge, the accident precipitated a crisis in all their lives and a move toward greater self-knowledge and deeper commitment to their partners for each of the four passengers.

Dark continued to grow in craftsmanship with *Sun Across the Sky*,⁶ where, as well as pursuing the spiritually degenerative effects of materialism on the individual, she suggested that Australians must change their unappreciative attitude toward artists and the things of the spirit. Now her characters' philosophical conjectures accompanied the exploration of individual relationships. The novelist set the action in the 1930s in fictional Thalassa, a coastal town in northern New South Wales, where the vital, energetic Dr. Oliver Denning was trapped in a sterile marriage with the sexually and socially inhibited Helen and attracted to the simplicity and spontaneity of the fey painter, Lois Marshall. The town had been developed as a resort by the rapacious tycoon,⁷ Sir Frederick Gormley, who wanted to

⁶ *Sun Across the Sky* was one of the chief contenders for the Commonwealth Sesquicentenary Literature prize in 1938, and was translated into German (1938), Italian (1948) and French (1948).

⁷ Cp. V. Palmer, *The Passage* (1930), London, 3rd impression, undated [1938]. In this novel the Callaway family and other fishermen lived in cottages and shanties in a small settlement adjacent to the town of Lavinia, which was built up as a tourist resort by the property developer, Osborne.

demolish a fishing village which, he believed, lowered the tone of the place. When the owner of the shabby cottages, the poet, Patrick Nicholas Kavanagh, refused to sell, Gormley blackmailed an arsonist, Strom, into starting a fire which destroyed both the village and Kavanagh. As Gormley fled the town in a panic, the remorseful, suicidal Strom killed them both by forcing their cars over a cliff, while, during the course of the disturbing day, Oliver decided to divorce Helen and marry Lois.

Published in a time of international discord, *Waterway*, set in Sydney and its suburb, Watsons Bay, was a stimulating urban novel. Suggesting a pattern for social change and positing socialism as preferable to capitalism, Dark implied that the practice of real day-to-day fraternalism would do much toward creating a fairer society. Her Oliver Denning, now married to Lois and living in Watsons Bay, became a linking character as six tales unfolded. The wise Professor Channon, despite terminal cancer, struggled to complete the book which was to provide a blueprint for a better society, while his daughter, Win, illustrated Dark's conception of the problems inherent in marriage and parenthood. Unhappily married to wealthy Arthur Sellman and in love with the widower, Ian Harnet, Win faced a situation in which divorce would probably cost her the custody of her only child, the blind Brenda. The socially responsible Lesley, Win's younger sister, must choose between the playboy, Sim Hegarty, and the socialist, Roger Blair, while Sim's down-to-earth mother, Lady Hegarty, agonised over the way in which she and her husband had inculcated in their son an acceptance of privilege as his right. Arthur's sister, Lorna, displayed all the unattractive habits of an empty-headed socialite as she plotted to capture Sim in marriage, while the novelist used Jack Saunders to illustrate the tragic frustration of a working man who was caught in the trap of unemployment and could see no way of forging ahead on his life journey. As these stories reached crisis point, Dark gathered them together with the sinking of a harbour ferry, thereby resolving, perhaps too opportunely, individual, if not social, problems.

In *Waterway*, Dark had taken advantage of the official colonial records of early settlement to provide the excerpts which preceded each section, and which disclosed the various ways in which the harbour and its surrounds appeared to the First Fleeters. She delved deeper into that early history in

her next work, *The Timeless Land*,⁸ which was to become the first novel of the historical trilogy, a poetically reflective treatment of the first twenty-five years of settlement in Australia. The novelist had begun writing *The Timeless Land* in 1937, when the effects of the economic depression still lingered, when classes were divided and liberal democracy faced a confrontation with Fascism. She turned to the past in order to place present-day problems in a significant perspective, hoping to encourage her readers to consider change - both psychological and material - in the knowledge that, in a previous period of great change, the early settlers had not only survived an evil system but had experienced social renewal. Change was the dominant theme - positive for the Europeans and negative for the Aborigines - as the writer explored the process by which members of the white community gradually formed roots with the new land, while, at the same time, the indigenous people were thrown into confusion as their own culture was confronted with, and undermined by, that of the Europeans. The novel covered the years from 1788 to 1795, during which Governor Phillip won the first battle in the fight for survival and attempted to create an understanding with the natives, particularly through the volatile Bennilong. It introduced the fictional free settlers, the Mannions, and the convicts, Andrew and Ellen Prentice, and told of the refuge which the escapee, Andrew, established in the mountains and which his son, Johnny, was later to inherit.

Dark interrupted the writing of the trilogy with *The Little Company*, a contemporary, self-reflexive novel in which she admirably sustained an atmosphere of foreboding as she transmitted to the reader her perception of a cultural crisis in human history. Exploring the reactions of a group of progressive intellectuals to the Second World War, the novelist continued to expound her theme of the need for cultural and spiritual survival in a demoralised world. Set in Sydney and in the Blue Mountains town of Katoomba, the relatively slight action began with the novelist, Gilbert Massey, suffering 'writer's block'. Married to the inadequate Phyllis and with two adult daughters and a son, he became involved in an affair with a would-be writer, the self-absorbed Elsa Kay, but found no spiritual fulfilment in the shallow relationship. In the course of the story, Gilbert's elder daughter, the promiscuous Virginia, died from a ruptured ectopic pregnancy, while the

⁸ *The Timeless Land* was published in Swedish (1945) and German (1954). A dramatised version of the trilogy was televised by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1980.

more thoughtful Prue illustrated the pitfalls of wartime love-affairs when she fell in love with an American soldier who was soon posted to the war zone. Phyllis had become mentally disturbed and, learning of Gilbert's intimacy with Elsa, attempted suicide. Dark left the book open-ended, with family problems unresolved, but Gilbert's overcoming of his creative paralysis projected some sort of more positive future. Yet, filled though it was with stimulating ideas, in this novel Dark failed to bring most of the characters to life because their intellectual qualities, as described at length, overwhelmed their vitality and spontaneity.

The novels of the trilogy, although each complete in itself, were connected by the theme of change in the developing settlement, and by the ongoing stories of the Mannion and Prentice families. *Storm of Time* presented the sensitive Conor, Stephen Mannion's second wife, who, from the viewpoint of a white, wealthy, middle-class lady, related events in the colony during the years 1799 to 1808 when each of the three governors, Hunter, King and Bligh, clashed with the New South Wales Corps, and when relations with the Aborigines worsened. Johnny Prentice entrenched himself in his new life with the natives, effected the escape of Matthew Finn, the Irish convict who dreamt of establishing an asylum for escapees, and murdered Stephen Mannion.

The period between 1808 and 1814 was the time-frame for *No Barrier* which dealt with Governor Macquarie and the class struggle between the emancipists and the 'exclusives', and with the crossing of the mountain barrier which had imprisoned the settlers on the eastern seaboard. The deterioration of the Aborigines accelerated as they suffered further displacement, Johnny kidnapped the newly-widowed Emily Rocks and began with her what promised to be a rewarding life. Conor remarried, her stepson, Miles, returned from Ireland with a bride, and his brother, Patrick, was killed by a footpad.

Lantana Lane, Dark's last book, displayed a different and most appealing aspect of her literary personality, revealing an elegant wit and a bracing sense of comedy. She wrote of the 1950s, a period which, despite the Cold War, was one of peace, economic stability and technological

progress in Australia, and ideological tensions relaxed as she took her readers to a small, fruit-farming community in Queensland⁹ which faced a profoundly disturbing change - invasion by a modern motorway. This work was not so much a novel as a collection of eighteen loosely-connected, droll short stories,¹⁰ essays and character sketches which recounted the adventures and misadventures of the 'Lane' inhabitants who formed among themselves a way of life which approached the ideal. Mature, serene and authoritative, Eleanor Dark ended her career as a novelist with this exhilarating work, still shedding light on those human practices which erode the art of living, yet affirming, as always, the joy of life, this time to the accompaniment of joyful laughter.

This somewhat skeletal overview of works, plots and themes has been provided here to give a framework to the following chapters, in which some of the most significant ideas are teased out in ways which show how Dark's fiction constituted a sequence of novels of ideas, and a chronicle of white Australia as she saw it from its foundation to her own day, with its stresses and strains largely unnoticed by the populace to whom she was reaching out.

In the following chapter I propose to illustrate Dark's idea of the life journey and the way in which certain of her characters grappled with its difficulties as they struggled toward the goal of true freedom - the freedom to be fully human and so to achieve all that their natures would allow them to become in a caring, integrated society.

⁹ Dark was familiar with the milieu although, in the book, she used fictitious names for the townships. See statement, ML MSS 4545 dated 9/8/86, signed by Dark's stepson, J. O. Dark on behalf of Dr. E. P. Dark, Michael Dark and the late Eleanor Dark, which discussed the Darks' temporary absences from Katoomba: 'Eleanor and Eric Dark used to move there mainly during the Katoomba winter, having bought a small citrus and Macadamia farm in Mill Rd., Montville. It was there that Eleanor's last book, *Lantana Lane*, was written.'

Montville is situated in the Blackall Range, Queensland. See Dark, 'The Blackall Range Country', in *Walkabout*, 21 (November 1, 1955), pp. 18-20.

¹⁰ One of these, 'The Narrow Escape of Herbie Bassett', appeared in J. K. Ewers (ed.), *Modern Australian Short Stories*, Melbourne, 1965.

Chapter Two

THE JOURNEY - 'the long pageant of human endeavour'

In *Return to Coolami* Dark featured a car with a radiator cap adorned by a silver-plated, primitive figure 'straining forward' with an air of 'eagerness, of adventure.' (*RC*, p. 8) This gleaming figurehead well symbolised her ideal protagonists, those characters who were seen again and again pushing forward against life's buffetings, confronting the mysteries of 'time, being, matter, space' (*SaS*, p. 85), striving toward self-realisation and harmony, a goal which might never be realised, but which constantly lured them on.

Prelude for Christopher provided a clear example of the life journey as romantic quest with the novelist tracing the progress of the young Dr. Nigel Hendon, a 'striving, urgent creature' (*PC*, p. 64), who, 'driven by the 'twin flames of energy and idealism' (*PC*, p. 13), believed that every human being must be

... prepared to stand up to Life - to take it in the face like a breaker that would probably dump you and rub your nose along the sand, but which would give you ... some elemental joy that no sunlit shallows have. (*PC*, p. 149)

He demonstrated his sense of purpose when he decided to direct his talents toward

... some goal ...some scheme to which one could harness the power of one's richly stored mind, and drive it tirelessly to some magnificent fulfilment. (*PC*, p. 13)

Considering his own society, which seemed to him to be beset by 'incredible ignorance, incredible ugliness and futility' (*PC*, p. 11), Nigel rejected the thought of 'resigned acceptance' (*PC*, p. 24), and flung himself against all it represented. His reaction to an old sailor's tale of an unpeopled Pacific island 'of elemental beauty' (*PC*, p. 11) was not surprising:

It became the most important thing in the world to him that he should know where that island was; it loomed up before him, a vast symbol of something that he most passionately

desired. (*PC*, pp. 13-14)

Dark stressed the romantic nature of the journey as, accompanied by his friend, Dr. Penleigh, Nigel sailed on an 'enchanted voyage' (*PC*, p. 31) to the exotic, mysterious land of promise, 'the lost Eden, the island of the blessed.' (*PC*, p. 22) He was a crusader 'questing as ardently as any knight after his vision of the Holy Grail', and he found it - 'the island that had become his symbol of attainment.' (*PC*, p. 22)¹ Intent on establishing 'a new world in miniature', he regarded it as 'the brilliant and privileged beginning of a new endeavour' (*PC*, p. 64), which would provide an antidote to existing social evils.

Nigel was a man of reason, his 'whole creed ... normality and the rational ordering of an irrational world.' (*PC*, p. 49) Remembering the beggars he had seen in the city - the 'undersized, hollow-eyed man' and his inert young wife 'whose weary, sagging attitude over the unprotesting baby on her knee made her seem infinitely old' (*PC*, p. 25) - he decided that he must establish a society in which such debilitated human beings could no longer reproduce themselves. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, the colonists were 'extremely fond of people who [werē] mentally deficient',² but Nigel was determined to have none of them, and, passionately committed to establishing an ideal world on his island, he instigated a eugenic programme which, he contended, 'with that capacity for faith which all idealists must have' (*PC*, p. 66), would be 'a short cut to a perfected humanity.' (*PC*, p. 63)³

'Live dangerously' (*PC*, p. 149) was this dedicated reformer's catchword, and he willingly accepted the risks involved. Society opposed such a revolutionary idea for reform, however, and the two doctors found daunting obstacles in their way. They courageously faced a 'storm of ridicule and vilification', survived 'the merciless flaying of the newspapers, the thunderings from every pulpit in the country', endured 'the jeers and

¹ Cp. A. Huxley, *Island*, New York, 1962, p. 246, where the members of the community on the island of Pala lived 'in harmony with the rest of life' and developed to the full their human potential.

² T. More, *Utopia* (1516), translated by Paul Turner, Harmondsworth, 1978, p.105.

³ Cp. H.G. Wells, *The Sleeper Awakes and Men Like Gods* (1923), London, undated, p. 235, where it was stated that his utopia tolerated 'no lunatics, no defectives, nor cripples.'

sneers' of acquaintances as well as their friends' 'thinly-veiled astonishment.' (*PC*, p. 67) Yet, as one of Dark's practical idealists, both scientist and dreamer, Nigel had every chance of succeeding in the venture. As the biologist, Hamlin, put it,

The plain idealist ... is just a dreamer. And the plain practical man is ... a necessary evil. But the practical idealist - why he's a very nearly irresistible force. (*PC*, p. 18)

With Penleigh's support the doctor forged ahead on the quest, establishing and developing a co-operative colony of 'picked human beings' (*PC*, p. 68), where, in a pastoral setting, the members laboured for the common good, yet preserved their own individuality by doing the work which they found most congenial. This was Nigel's ideal world in which

... men and women worked, each at the work they loved. Babies were born and crawled on green grass under a warm sun that coloured their bodies rosy brown ... There they all were floating in an impossible, precarious loveliness. (*PC*, p. 74)

Yet, as he was to argue, this idealistic scheme was also 'sound and rational' (*PC*, p. 95), and produced a place of 'work, and peace, and contentment.' (*PC*, p. 73) Developing from a community into 'a civilisation' (*PC*, p. 32), his utopian experiment 'had worked ... for five whole years.' (*PC*, p. 32)

As Ibsen had his reactionary mayor, Stockmann, assert, however, 'The public doesn't need new ideas - the public is much better off with old ideas'.⁴ The Australian power elite was loath to have society changed by a reformer whose '[s]trange theories hit at established creeds.' (*PC*, p. 158) As they saw that the experiment was working, the more restrained newspapers renewed their campaign against him, contemptuously dubbing him 'The Founder of the Earthly Paradise.' Soon he fell victim to 'the sensational press' whose headlines 'butchered him to make a journalistic holiday', asking 'What goes on there? Abominations Practised in the Name of Science; Powers of Evil Reign on Lonely Island.'⁵ Now the people were persuaded 'to believe anything of him' (*PC*, p. 89):

⁴ H. Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People, An Adaptation for the American Stage* by Arthur Miller (1950), New York, 1951, Act 1, Scene 2, p. 31.

⁵ Cp. H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), London, 1960.

In trains, in shops, in the streets, his name, which should have been so honourably famous, [was] spoken with a sneer, with a laugh, with the bated breath of morbid curiosity. (*PC*, pp. 42-3)

The Great War erupted, and Nigel's hope for a better society was shattered when 'human nature ... proved itself too strong for his theories' (*PC*, p. 123) and the carefully chosen colonists failed him, destroying their own community and their chance of promoting human progress. When they insisted that it was their duty to fight in the war, Nigel's argument that 'what you're doing here is worth more than all the wars that were ever fought' (*PC*, p. 163) enraged them. Giving rein to 'the frenzy of blood-lust they had whipped up in themselves' (*PC*, p. 164), the colonists '[flung] off their civilisation like a garment' (*PC*, p. 176), assaulted Nigel, murdered Penleigh and rushed lemming-like to the battlefields. In a mood of cynical and suicidal despair, Nigel, too, enlisted and went to fight in France.

Returning to Australia, still branded 'an outsider' by 'that omnipotent power known as Everybody' (*PC*, p. 70), he wrote a book condemning war and explaining the purposes of his colony. The people, however, won over by leaders who had only a vague conception of what he was trying to accomplish, reacted by publicly reviling him for the seemingly aberrant sexual aspect of his experiment. They fell upon him. Once again

... press and pulpit thundered against him, the patriotic leagues and societies expelled him, the very hospitals dared not give him work. Then the book was banned. (*PC*, p. 71)⁶

It was dangerous, it made them uncomfortable. As Dr. Marlow, a later colleague of Nigel, was to observe ironically, the book made them feel as if 'every grown man and woman who sat back in smug complacency and watched the world wag its wicked way to ultimate perdition' were 'responsible for the awful fate that must inevitably overtake it.' (*PC*, p. 65)⁷

⁶ Cp. Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947), London, 1983, p. 136: 'The state would have put down a protest against the social system as if it were an act of disloyalty to the state.'

⁷ Cp. Murphy, *Human Potentialities*, London, 1960, p. 99: 'Even if the thoughtful individualist should appear who would sketch Utopian modes of social evolution, ... it is difficult to see how he could make himself heard and how such an unaccustomed mode of thought could be made to appear realistic.'

Had he aimed too high? Dark had her protagonist insist that his idealistic ideas were well balanced with commonsense, and that the colony could have played an important part in the evolution of society if the people had persisted with the experiment. Marlow commented, 'Not a theory that all the world of science hadn't accepted, not an idea that any intelligent man or woman wouldn't accept.' (*PC*, p. 66) Indeed, Nigel's book, with its plethora of 'plans and statistics' (*PC*, p. 80), was in danger of sounding almost too scientific in his effort to prove that his scheme was not just the work of 'a dreamer, a sentimentalist.' (*PC*, p. 81) He rejected his critics' accusations of its failure with 'his unrelenting recital of facts, his incontrovertible figures.' The merits of the experiment 'he had stated without exaggeration; and when they seized on its weaknesses he was there before them.' (*PC*, p. 71) Marlow summed up the matter:

It was the work of a scientist, merciless in its cold logic, its accuracy, its careful weighing of facts, its utter refusal to add one iota more to its verdict than its evidence warranted. (*PC*, p. 71)

So the practical dream was 'beaten down and overwhelmed and trampled into unrecognisable baseness' (*PC*, p. 73) because of the limited outlook of society and its leaders. Reflecting on his efforts in 'the long pageant of human endeavour' (*SaS*, p. 52), hampered so unnecessarily by his fellows, Nigel wondered whether, on the life journey, 'you should follow the level road and by foregoing the heights evade the depths', whether 'you should ... build for yourself a little path walled high on both sides with comforting illusions, and walk there in smug security for all your days.' (*PC*, p. 149) Yet 'the man who had tried and failed to build a world' (*PC*, p. 54) could not wholly accept this philosophy, and remained confident that the resilient human spirit would prevail and continue to strive for some form of social regeneration:

It would come again and last a little longer, and die again as it had died before, painfully, horribly. For yet another reincarnation. (*PC*, p. 73)

In *The Timeless Land* Dark looked back to the past and to part of the life journey of a leader. Assessing the ability of the Australian people to withstand the hardships of the Second World War, in *The Little Company* the novelist, Gilbert, described their beginnings:

These were not docile people. This was not ... a country living in its past, but still struggling away from it. It had begun badly; it grew up the hard way. Physically, mentally and spiritually handicapped, it had sweated and blundered its way out of the dark era when human flesh and blood, having suffered the deterioration of poverty, having endured nightmare voyages in the hell-ships of the day, had still by some miracle lived to tread a new earth, and kept enough vitality to reproduce itself. Human minds, warped, hardened, illiterate, and full of hatred, had still clung to the idea of survival and perpetuation. Human spirits, damned almost to impotence by the tradition of their own worthlessness, had still kept alive, instinctively, a spark of faith in the possibility of regeneration. (*TLC*, pp. 66-67)

The historical trilogy was the story of that heroic struggle, 'a history of obstinate striving, of hardship, ugliness, loneliness, success and failure, effort and more effort.' (*TTL*, p. 67) There, too, were the stories of the Aborigines' struggle to preserve their own culture in the face of invasion; of the convicts whose gruelling efforts, however unwillingly given, were instrumental in the colony's growth; of the women whose efforts to found stable homes, rear families and foster a national consciousness had largely been ignored; and of the children who performed the (perhaps unconscious) feat of outgrowing their unpromising beginnings to become sturdy, worthwhile currency lads and lasses who claimed the country as their home.

Dark's account of the colony's early history was one of progress dogged by brutal setbacks, of plenty and privation, of hope followed by despair, and over and over she used a series of key words to describe the colony's vicissitudes. 'Energy', 'determination' and 'endurance' indicated the effort; 'anxiety', 'distress' and 'frustration' the disappointment; 'abandoned', 'exile' and 'doubt' were linked to the despair; then 'tenacity', 'hope' and 'faith' reflected continued striving; and finally 'optimism' and 'survival' heralded the attainment of the goal, the establishment of the

colony.

When Governor Arthur Phillip took formal possession of the land in 1788 by raising the British flag at Sydney Cove, he began 'a task which, seen from a distance as a whole, looked colossal, epic, a task for a giant or a hero.' (*TTL*, p.113) This was a worthy leader who was determined 'to make unequivocally clear, not only to the convicts, but to the whole community, his position of authority', together with 'his inflexible determination to use it for the best interest of the settlement as a whole' (*TTL*, p. 106), and he accepted it as part of his role as leader 'that the rest of the community should lean morally on him.' (*TTL*, p. 274)

Dark's Phillip was a practical idealist. A man of the enlightenment, he considered himself 'above all and beyond as a practical man' (*TTL*, p. 106), taking life as it came, 'dealing with it logically ... and wasting no time on what might have been.' (*TTL*, p. 505) Yet 'he could see visions' (*TTL*, p. 106), and as he confronted his task, he had a perception that 'the seed of some future greatness lay in this dismal beginning.' (*TTL*, p. 106) In deciding to plan ahead, then,

... boldly, nobly, magnificently, not for a convict settlement, ... but for a city, the headquarters of a nation of free men (*TTL*, p. 191),⁸

he had an 'unwavering, almost fanatical faith' (*TTL*, p. 402) in his ability to achieve his goal.

As he resolutely faced the grim reality of this contest which had become part of his life journey, Phillip⁹ was a typical example of Dark's heroically striving human being. He had 'immense, inexhaustible reserves of fortitude' (*TTL*, p. 111), together with 'a tenacity of purpose which allowed no obstacle as insuperable' (*TTL*, p. 137), yet he acknowledged the risks

⁸ Cp. J. B. Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies: A history of early New South Wales*, Sydney, 1983, p. 82: 'The making of a free society had been going on almost from the first day', with free children born to convict parents, while, upon the convicts gaining their freedom, no bar was placed on their economic activities. As well, they enjoyed the same legal rights as those who had come free.

⁹ See P. Ryan, 'Manning Clark', *Quadrant* September 1993, p. 11: In Manning Clark's early lectures on Australian history, his picture of Captain Arthur Phillip 'was drawn ... largely from Eleanor Dark's novel, *The Timeless Land*.'

ahead as he foresaw a struggle 'whose dangers and difficulties he was too sane to ignore.' (*TTL*, p. 78) He decided to take one step at a time, with 'each step firm - and forward' (*TTL*, p. 106), for only in this way could he deal with the obstacles which baulked him at every turn. From the first, he realised that his colony of Europeans were at the mercy of forces which he had not anticipated. Hovering over them was the threat of attack by the unpredictable Aborigines. Nature itself seemed determined to confound them with furious thunderstorms which beat their huts into the ground and killed livestock, while Phillip had an eerie feeling that the land, with its thin, poor topsoil and shortage of fresh water, was 'passively obstructing them.' (*TTL*, p. 67) Any idea of becoming self-supporting dwindled when the few animals which had survived the voyage failed to thrive, the Governor's own cattle were lost in the bush and the fish seemed to have vanished from the harbour.

Humanity's perverse propensity to interfere with its own advancement quickly became evident. For the Governor it 'was not the magnitude of his task which appalled him, but the petty triviality of the obstructions which he found constantly in his way.' (*TTL*, p. 114) The convicts, understandably, took advantage of 'an opportunity at least to hinder and obstruct, if not openly to rebel', when they became aware that the administrators were 'hampered by lack of all that social machinery' which they normally used to oppress their victims. So the felons appreciated the irony of

... authority in difficulties, authority working not with the whole might and power of its established sovereignty behind it, but isolated, in disorder. (*TTL*, p. 70)

More reprehensible was the 'stupid, sulky obstructionism' (*TTL*, p. 192) caused by the behaviour of Lieutenant-Governor Major Ross and his Marines. Although Phillip refused to let it foil his efforts, in this tense, 'nerve-destroying atmosphere' (*TTL*, p. 222) his own poor health¹⁰ was aggravated by their discontents and quarrels. Conscious of 'the disastrous psychological stresses which bear down the morale of a crowded and isolated community' (*TTL*, p.80), and conceding that it was natural that, 'far removed from their friends and the amenities of civilised life', there should

¹⁰ A. Frost, *Arthur Phillip 1738-1814, His Voyaging*, Melbourne, 1987, p. 218: The historian reported that Phillip suffered from violent pain in the left kidney.

arise among the members of the military 'mistrust, jealousies, grievances' (*TTL*, p. 209), he still agonised over 'the waste of time which is brought about by the conflicting of incompatible temperaments.' (*TTL*, p. 132) Dark presented Major Ross as growing increasingly hostile toward the Governor, jealous of his autocratic powers and resenting what he regarded as his uncommunicative stance.

As R. H. Tawney commented, every generation, standing

... at a new point on the road ... finds that fresh ranges of the landscape come into view, whose unfamiliar intricacies demand an amplification of traditional charts,¹¹

and it is useful at this point to compare the many possible interpretations of historical events. Dark's Ross was seen as lacking 'the detached common sense which told Phillip that when two people cannot agree they had best keep apart as much as possible.' (*TTL*, p. 109) The modern historian, Alan Atkinson, however, justified Ross's attitude, pointing out that

... [Ross] was the first but not the only individual who looked at the colony from a strictly political point of view, and who equated Australia with tyranny, or at least with an undue authoritarianism.¹²

Furthermore, when Phillip realised that the authorities had provided no overseers for the convicts, he saw the Major's refusal to allow his Marines to supervise 'such scum' (*TTL*, p. 109) as another means of frustrating his efforts to establish order in the settlement. In Ross's favour Atkinson argued, 'They had some excuse for regarding the idea as idiosyncratic and quite unauthorised by Whitehall.'¹³

In any case, Ross lost no time in dispatching to the Secretary of State a protest at the 'absurd, tyrannical moods of its Governor.' (*TTL*, p. 173) Anticipating this, Phillip worried about the threat which such behaviour posed to the progress of the colony, and he reflected on the powers of his

¹¹ Tawney, in Hinden, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹² A. Atkinson, 'Sunshine From Frost', in A. Atkinson (ed.), *The Push From the Bush*, No. 26, 1988, p. 20.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 16.

superiors:

Upon the letters which these ships carried back to England might depend the fate of his colony; he thought of it thus, possessively, jealous for its welfare and advancement.' (*TTL*, p. 175)

Such letters would be read and 'debated by men who had it in their power to wrest him, by a word, from this enterprise in which he had somehow acquired so deep rooted a faith.' (*TTL*, p. 175) Phillip was determined that this must not happen:

Not if he could prevent it would all this effort and endurance be wasted! Not if words of his could influence them should the authorities uproot this sickly offshoot of their country, struggling for survival in an inhospitable earth! He had sown the seed, he had tended and cherished the plant, and he believed with all his heart that it would live to reach maturity. (*TTL*, p. 282)

Dark emphasised the divisions which threatened the colony's growth by investing the Aborigines with a view of the Europeans' camp as a place of discord. They watched the white people 'labouring incessantly, achieving nothing but confusion.' (*TTL*, p. 248) Attuned as they were to the silent land, to the natives 'the noisy display of officialdom' (*TTL*, p. 104) was shocking, as 'the air was filled and shaken by a perpetual torment of sound':

There were shoutings and bangings and the noisy tramp of feet. There were clankings of chains, loud reports from the fire-breathing weapons, cries of pain, incessant hammerings, loud music. (*TTL*, p. 453)

The native girl Booron, adopted by the Johnsons, was made to reflect, 'But among these Bereewolgal what division! What conflict!' (*TTL*, p.345) and the captured warrior, Arabanoo, was shown to be aware of the 'hatred and unhappiness' (*TTL*, p. 209) in the settlement. Later Cunnembeillee, the Aboriginal wife of the escaped convict, Andrew Prentice, was to claim that 'a tribe so divided against itself was a tribe whose foundations shook', and that

... so fixed and implacable a hatred of man for man became, all too easily, hatred of man for life, hatred of man for himself, a terrible inner decay, spelling ruin and

disaster. (*TTL*, p. 470)

It was through the perceptions of the Aborigines, too, that Dark voiced her passionate protest at the Europeans' treatment of the convicts. The originally admiring Bennilong came to despise the white men, not least because 'they held many of their own race in infamous subjection, and inflicted upon them indignities which turned the black men cold with loathing.' (*TTL*, p. 540) By 'insisting upon the inferiority of their fellows' (*TTL*, p. 209), humiliating and stripping them of all dignity, the novelist suggested that the gaolers not only mutilated their victims' psyches but diminished their own humanity and potential for growth, 'warping and flawing their image of themselves', for 'a man, looking into the eyes of another man, sees himself therein.' (*TTL*, pp. 129-30) As Arabanoo watched a convict suffer a flogging Dark had him wonder:

Could not the Bereewolgal see that this was an evil magic which they were spinn ng about themselves? Could they not see that for one man to shame another destroys them both? (*TTL*, p. 213)

There could be no realisation of human potential in 'this evil atmosphere of harshness and despair' (*TTL*, p. 395), only 'the resentment, the rebelliousness which continued misery will always arouse in mankind.' (*TTL*, p. 395). The convicts were trapped in a vicious circle: 'Theft was the inevitable consequence of hunger; punishment was the inevitable consequence of theft; [and] rebellion was the inevitable consequence of punishment.' (*TTL*, p. 396) Neither could there be any joy in life for these apathetic creatures. To the energetic Phillip, 'apathy was a negation of all that he felt life to be, and he asked himself, 'What must a man endure ... before he is brought to this condition, this living death?' (*TTL*, p. 421) The answer was obvious:

They had been conditioned all their lives to submission and obedience; only the shreds and remnants of moral strength remained to them (*TTL*, p. 212),

while underlying their misery was the 'poisonous belief' that the English authorities only wanted to be rid of them and cared little whether they lived or died. 'They were cumberers of the earth - but at least they need no longer

cumber the soil of their native land.' (*TTL*, p. 412)

The Governor had always felt that, as the representative of the king and the British Government, he was fulfilling an honourable function, 'one to which a man might bring his whole heart.' Now, however, he discovered with dismay that 'time and distance were blurring the outlines of Whitehall, and dimming the Royal countenance.' His country's leaders were able to hold the ignorant and the rebellious 'in suitable docility' with traditions and with emblems of power,

... cathedral spires, great estates, carriages and liveries, the authoritative bearing of the nobility and gentry, the actual bodily presence of the Sovereign. (*TTL*, p.440)

Phillip, however, was isolated and deprived of this 'psychological background', and, in upholding such distant authority, he was 'sometimes visited by a nightmare feeling that he was lending himself to a rather foolish bit of mummery - acting deputy to ghosts.' (*TTL*, pp. 440-41)

Conditioned to obey his leaders, 'trained from childhood to see obedience to Authority as the first of all the virtues' (*TTL*, p. 373), Dark's Phillip had always revered the ideal of duty. For the times, he was something of a humanitarian, with an 'indestructible faith in human dignity and worth.' (*TTL*, p. 192) Yet, with his 'sensitiveness ... blunted by the constant sight of men in chains, men imprisoned, men humiliated' (*TTL*, p. 82), he had been able to preserve an attitude of detachment toward the convicts 'as long as there had been in his mind no doubt of the justice and inevitability of their fate.' (*TTL*, p. 422) As they all suffered and survived the hardships of their shared little world, however, and he began to understand the desperate resorts to which hunger drives human beings, he was 'forced to recognise a common humanity between himself and those defeated men.' (*TTL*, p. 422)

In this man of reason feelings of compassion gained strength and certainties crumbled. Was he paying homage to a false ideal? He could wield his power over the lives of this 'motley crowd of human beings' (*TTL*, p. 506) only within the limitations which his superiors imposed upon him.

Increasingly he felt the need to be true to himself, becoming dissatisfied with these limitations and ever 'more rebelliously determined to break through them to some higher plane of conduct, unhampered by custom - by Orders - by Duty.' (*TTL*, p. 373) In danger of taking over was

... that visionary self whose persistent faith and ardour he vaguely resented, and whose light yet found its way through all his sober actions, and lit his cold, official words with vagrant gleams of warmth. (*TTL*, p. 506)

The Governor was trapped, however, unable to break out of the prison of a social conditioning which demanded obedience to 'man-made creeds and customs and conceptions' (*TTL*, p. 195), and which foiled his chance of achieving full potential as a human being. A stranger to the concept of flexibility, he could only fall back on the 'rigid performance of duty' (*TTL*, p. 195) and follow the rules

... grimly and undeviatingly, because there was nothing else he could do. The problem was too big for him, too big for any one day, or for any single generation of men. The land, he felt wearily, would settle it in its own good time, and meanwhile he was still the faithful servant of his majesty King George III. (*TTL*, p. 441)

It became obvious in the settlement's first days that the British authorities - the 'Secretary of State, the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury, and the Lords of the Admiralty' (*TTL*, p. 282) - were contributing greatly to the impediments which blocked Phillip's way forward in his enterprise. They had sent poor quality implements and tools, as well as inadequate clothing reserves for the felons. Desperately needing artisans and farmers among the convicts, he was assigned, instead, the old and the sick, and many who had already proved themselves to be 'idle, depraved, ignorant.' (*TTL*, p. 88) His anger stirred as he examined their ranks:

He had asked for men who had some training or some knowledge which would make them useful in the establishment of a colony; at the very least, he had urged, let him have sound men - healthy men. Never, by one word, spoken or written, would he criticise His Majesty's Government, but in his heart he knew that its first concern had been to rid itself as expeditiously as possible of human

beings whose utter uselessness would make them, in any community, an expensive embarrassment, a well-nigh insoluble problem.

With courage and determination he resolved that, treacherous as the foundation appeared to be, on it 'he must, somehow, build solidly. It seemed possible to him.' (*TTL*, p. 88)

When the first vegetable crop failed, the community was forced to draw on the stores more heavily than anticipated. Short rations sapped the convicts' energy, and, admitting that 'he could not pretend to himself that they had made as much progress as he had hoped' (*TTL*, p. 191), Phillip put the situation down to 'a difficult and unsavoury stage in an upward struggle.' (*TTL*, p. 192) He sent an urgent request for supplies to the English administrators. When, after many months, the long awaited store ships still had not arrived, the wrathful Surgeon-General White exploded,

In the name of Heaven what has the ministry been about? Surely they have quite forgotten or neglected us otherwise they would have sent to see what had become of us, and to know how we were likely to succeed. (*TTL*, p. 282)

Much later Alan Frost would argue that the British government was not remiss in its care for the infant colony, that 'within eighteen days of receiving news of their circumstances, it was moving to succour them', fitting out the *Guardian*, 'a fast-sailing vessel selected for the particular purpose of satisfying the colony's wants.'¹⁴

Incredibly, however, inspired by the Governor's resolution, the settlement gained ground. The people were jubilant when the *Lady Juliana*, forerunner of the Second Fleet, arrived, but were soon cast down by its disappointingly small food cargo and the distressing news that the *Guardian*, with a consignment of stores and convict tradesmen, was damaged and stranded at the Cape of Good Hope. The *Lady Juliana* had also brought some two hundred and twenty female convicts, with the promise of a thousand more felons to follow. The authorities' despatch accompanying them contained a stern order that adequate arrangements must be made for

¹⁴ A. Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages, Illusions of Australia's Convict Beginnings*, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 146-47.

the convicts' accommodation and employment, and expressed the hope that the expensive stores be put 'to the best possible advantage.' (*TTL*, p. 292)

Phillip was aghast:

Accommodation, when even now the shelter which they had for those who had arrived with the First Fleet was inadequate! Employment, when many of the women were either too ill or too old to work! (*TTL*, p. 293)

'How little, he thought, was understood of their plight at home, if it were imagined that food might be wasted at Sydney Cove!' (*TTL*, p. 292) For a few horrified moments the disheartened Governor saw his colony 'not as the beginning of a human achievement, but as the climax and culmination of human degradation.' (*TTL*, p. 293) Dark again emphasised the role which the British administrators played in frustrating his chances of forging ahead on his project:

He could not keep pace with such a deluge of useless humanity. He could not build from it. As fast as he built, imposing his pattern of order and integrity, shiftlessness, ignorance, and vice would appear like cracks in his edifice, threatening destruction. (*TTL*, p. 293)

The food shortage eased with the *Justinian's* arrival, but the Governor's alarm intensified when the rest of the fleet made port with their 'dreadful cargo' (*TTL*, p. 297), a shipment of convicts who had been treated infamously by transport captains who were paid for convicts shipped, not for convicts landed, so that 'the more deaths there were the fewer mouths to feed and the greater their profit.' (*TTL*, p. 298) Dark's protest at such greed and barbaric behaviour was inherent in Phillip's disgust when faced with 'such evidence of human bungling and brutality.' (*TTL*, p. 297)

Watching these 'scarcely human creatures' being unloaded 'like so much worthless merchandise' (*TTL*, p. 298), the Governor knew that they could only be a burden. 'From a colonising point of view most of them were worse than useless' (*TTL*, p. 299), but he took some comfort from the thought that they were still alive, and, looking ahead to his goal of a future nation, he persisted in his faith that, in the shape of their possible progeny, there was hope 'not *for* them but *from* them.' (*TTL*, p. 299) He was unable to

understand the authorities' deafness to his pleas:

Where were the farmers he had asked for? The carpenters, the bricklayers, the healthy, work-hungry men who were to have helped him build his dream into reality? (*TTL*, p. 299)

With the settlement 'suddenly crowded to bursting point', and starvation facing him, he was 'near to despair.' (*TTL*, p. 297)

Rallying his innate confidence, however, the Governor struggled on, 'with many to feed and not much to feed them with' (*TTL*, P. 393), gaining ground when he established agriculture on a sound basis at Rose Hill, then losing it when another drought plagued them with a water shortage and a poor harvest. Again the shortage of food blocked the colony's advance. Phillip kept the emaciated convicts working because he knew that a 'show of purposefulness' must be maintained and some 'semblance of progress' be made, for 'if once he allowed idleness to grip the community they were all doomed.' (*TTL*, p. 412) During the next three months the authorities sent the Third Fleet with two thousand more convicts and settlers for the already teeming settlement. Now, however, the exhausted Phillip was heartened to find that there was 'a quickened tempo of life in the community', with

... some of the urgency, the dynamic activity, the hidden motives and impulses, the incalculable potentialities which meant civilisation as he knew it. (*TTL*, p. 419)

Although by now the 'early stage of endeavour' was over, an insufficiency of food persisted so that still he must do battle with his superiors if the colony were to develop further. Again he reminded them that the settlement must have a regular food supply, a ship, livestock, clothing and tools, and particularly farmers:

They would do more for the colony than five hundred settlers from soldiers and convicts, very few of whom are calculated for the life they must necessarily lead in this country. (*TTL*, p. 443)

By the time the *Gorgon* arrived with supplies, Phillip knew that 'his part in it has finished', that his faith in the enterprise had been justified, and that the

colony was 'finally and indestructibly alive.' (*TTL*, p. 419) Yet, as he informed his leaders, he could not help feeling some regret,

... knowing how much might have been done in the time I have been in this country, and in how very different a state it would have been had we been more fortunate in receiving the necessary supplies, and a few intelligent men. (*TTL*, p. 443)

His goal had been the planting in the new land of 'the seed of his own land's glorious tradition'. During his struggle, however, he had acquired an awareness of the subtle power of the land to withstand interference so that, with 'a faint uneasy chill', he began to wonder whether 'he had made a false move' (*TTL*, p. 81) on the life journey. He sensed that he had

... lost his bearings - left himself vulnerable to some force which he named a danger only because it was more powerful than himself, who, by virtue of his commission from the King, should have been omnipotent. (*TTL*, p. 72)

Phillip, as idealist, had aimed too high. Dark showed that his dream was never possible, and, indeed, had brought him 'into conflict with the land' until he exercised his practicality in finally facing the fact that it 'was not England, and nothing could make it so.' (*TTL*, p. 441) Instead, doing 'as well ... as had been humanly possible with the poor material provided for him' (*TTL*, p. 509), he had achieved the practical goal of establishing a colony and ensuring its survival. 'He had fought its will to die with his own will for its survival ... and now it was finally and indestructibly alive.' (*TTL*, p. 419) Like Aeneas, he had laid the foundation of his city and carried to it the spark of European life: 'It's life we have brought here. The lamp may be dirty and untended, but the flame is pure. We can't harm that.' (*TTL*, p. 299)¹⁵ As he prepared to leave the settlement, knowing that its problems were far from over, that future Governors and settlers must face their own struggles, Phillip was convinced that from now on 'it would be less the spur of faith that was needed than the curb of wisdom.' (*TTL*, p. 509) As for the land:

He had felt greatness in it with his senses, and searched for it with his eyes; and though his eyes were not

¹⁵ See J. S. Ryan, 'A History of Australia as Epic', in C. Bridge (ed.), *Manning Clark, Essays on his Place in History*, Carlton, 1994, p. 62.

rewarded he still knew that it was there. (*TTL*, p. 504)

While, in the historical trilogy, so many of the powerful figures were doomed, the little people seemed to fare better. Using Andrew Prentice as a voice for the convicts and a representative of social change and the new white nation, Dark portrayed him as an example of one who experienced physical and spiritual regeneration in the new land. The fiery-haired, savage-tempered Prentice, used to a joyless existence which 'was not enriched, but made more base by every fresh experience' (*TTL*, p. 68), confronted 'a hostile world' with 'bitter enmity.' (*TTL*, p. 386) Hating those in authority, leaders of 'the civilisation which had used him so ill' (*TTL*, p. 438), Prentice's one objective was to defy 'them' and to take action against his seemingly unavoidable fate. 'Freedom. He thought of it incessantly.' (*TTL*, p. 163) So he directed his 'enormous physical vitality' (*TTL*, p. 106) into the one purpose of escape, with freedom and 'a life of plenty' his goal, holding to his course 'with the bitter obstinacy of a man who knew that without his aim, his one solitary idea, life would become hideous and intolerable.' (*TTL*, p. 163)¹⁶

Always 'he had met obstacles with fury and a tigerish vindictiveness' (*TTL*, p. 67) and he saw not only 'them', the detested ruling class, as obstructions to the realisation of his goal, but also the 'drab, silent and accursed country' (*TTL*, p. 84) which he had hated at first sight, convinced that it was resisting and intimidating him. Nevertheless, his initial attitude toward the environment was shown to change somewhat when, as he prepared for his decampment by hiding stolen weapons, tools and food in a cliffside cave, he was suddenly jolted by a startling awareness of the landscape's splendour and a fleeting sensation that it was 'spread out there for no eyes but his.' (*TTL*, p. 165) Gradually 'a new element in his concept of freedom' developed as he began to hope of escaping not from, but into, that land, and he experienced within himself 'a belated and heroic effort of his malformed spirit to rid itself of the accumulated ugliness of his life.' (*TTL*,

¹⁶ See R. J. Lifton, *The Protean Self, Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation*, New York, 1993, pp. 35-36. Prentice had much in common with Daniel Boone as 'a new man, the author and artificer of his own fortunes'; Boone, too, shared inter-racial sympathies, and was seen by some writers as an example of 'racial degeneracy - a white Indian'.

p. 165)

Prentice's first ordeal on the quest began when he lost his way to the cache. Enraged though he was at the country's ability to deceive him so easily, he refused to panic, intent on resisting the land's 'unseen forces' which, he believed, were 'waiting to destroy him.' (*TTL*, p. 224) When after two terrifying nights he found the cave, he 'felt his life lying in the hollow of his hand, the freedom he had won, his for ever' (*TTL*, p. 225), and he imagined a change in the atmosphere, 'as if, having tried him, and found him not less stubborn than itself, the land had grown less hostile.' (*TTL*, p. 225)

The convict's trials continued when he fell unconscious with a fever. Found by members of the Boorooberongal tribe, he was 'accepted, if not welcomed' (*TTL*, p. 228) into their camp. Recovered and eager to continue the journey, with the idea of gaining a 'slave, a guide, a mistress, a beast of burden all in one' (*TTL*, p. 230), he asked the elders for a woman and acquired the strong young Cunnembeillee. Prentice set up his camp on the banks of the Nepean, and soon afterwards, a small herd of the Governor's lost cattle wandered near. Exulting in his good luck, he followed them to their pasture on the rich river flats, and 'strange paths of thought, and stranger paths of hope' (*TTL*, p. 494) opened up when he realised that possession of the cattle marked 'the beginning of his future.' (*TTL*, p. 271)

Possessions had become for him the 'symbols of his hard-won freedom' (*TTL*, p. 225), and, after two years of 'dogged, unrelenting toil' (*TTL*, p. 494), he took stock of his gains and 'the intoxicating sense of worth' (*TTL*, p. 407) which they bestowed upon him. At this stage, far above the value of Cunnembeillee and their son, Billalong, he placed his solidly built hut, 'the laboriously turned earth within its strong fences' and 'the sleek cattle in their yard.' (*TTL*, p.407) Prentice had spent his boyhood 'among people who won subsistence from the earth' (*TTL*, p. 83), and now he experienced 'a fulfilment, a contentment long forgotten' when, 'with a queer emotion of mingled astonishment and joy', he rediscovered the satisfaction of working with the soil. As the store of knowledge 'which had remained dormant in his mind' (*TTL*, p. 385) came alive, and he was able to adapt it to this new environment, he experienced a certain pride:

His courage and his endurance and his determination grew and flowered under this rising sun of self-confidence, tried and justified. (*TTL*, p. 225)

The novelist had the fictional Irish free settler, Stephen Mannion, take up land on the opposite side of the Nepean, and, for Prentice, once more danger loomed. Hearing from the natives that other exploring parties were ranging still further west, he decided to move inland and set about building a hut in a hidden gully in the hills above the Burraborang valley. His sense of accomplishment was profound:

No moment in his life had been more rich in satisfaction than that in which he at last stood back to survey his finished handiwork, and to hang the key of his completed home about his neck. (*TTL*, p. 467)

'He had grown insensitiveness over his human spirit protectively as he had grown callouses on the palms of his hands' (*TTL*, p. 437), but now the several facets of his psyche began to function as this shell disintegrated, and he found himself gripped by 'an emotion so unfamiliar that he did not at first recognise it as happiness.' (*TTL*, p. 467) Freedom from hunger and fear had encouraged in him an awareness of his own potential,

... of another self dwelling within the body which had hitherto been his only preoccupation, and now he was ready for the first fumbling, awkward efforts at self-knowledge (*TTL*, p. 467),

conscious that he was 'a man, a human being, full of mysterious strength, not only physical.' (*TTL*, p. 494)

At first he had treated the natives with contempt, despising them for their lack of 'the cunning and the hatred which were his own weapons.' (*TTL*, p. 409) Self-reliance, however, induced in him a 'spiritual relaxation' (*TTL*, p. 435) which, aided by the efforts of his mediator and interpreter, Cunnebeillee, led to his developing an alliance with the Aborigines. As the invaders continued to intrude into their territory Prentice's hatred was stirred on behalf of the race 'whose blood mixed with his own in the veins of

his infant son', and he was overcome 'by an emotion which had never moved him before - compassion.' (*TTL*, p. 409) He made his first spiritual contact with another human being, when, proudly introducing Cunnembeillee to the new camp at Burragoorang, he felt a need for her approval. As she looked into his mind and sensed this need, Dark had her respond with a smile to his flash of emotion, while 'he found himself able for a strange second or two to look into hers.' (*TTL*, p. 478) He discovered there something which became a precious new possession, her affection, the first affection he could remember anyone having for him. With this revelation, he dared to look to 'a future which must be made and shaped for Billalong':

Into that realm he could not yet venture without a kind of uneasy diffidence, and in it he could walk only with a halting and uncertain step. Not his emotions, but his still anger-driven brain asserted his right to wander there. (*TTL*, p. 478)

To Prentice, Mannion had become the enemy - a representative of the hated 'them', the oppressors - and, having begun a series of successful raids on the Irishman's toolshed, he resolved to make one last haul on the night before the planned move to Burragorang. The Aborigines had warned him of threatening rain and a 'big water' (*TTL*, p. 486), and as he slept in his hideaway cave overlooking the river, the rain began. Back at their hut, Cunnembeillee became determined to introduce Billalong to her tribal family before she left the district, and she set out for their towri, but, as she crossed a small creek she slipped and the current dragged Billalong from her arms, sucking him into the swollen river. Catching the baby she grasped the branch of a passing tree which swept them into the view of Mannion and his overseer and of Prentice, on the opposite bank. When the overseer's attempt to lasso the branch failed and the tree swung toward him, Prentice recognised Cunnembeillee and Billalong and watched her frantic attempts to reach the shore.

Now Dark confronted the convict with a moral choice, as, aghast, he was torn with 'the frenzy of his first spiritual conflict.' For

... instantly there had arisen in him a frantic clamour of panic-stricken protest. Not only life, it shouted at him, was endangered here, but freedom (*TTL*, p. 493),

the freedom which he valued

... not only for what it gave him, but for what it made him, and his terror of losing it was becoming the terror of losing that something in himself which it had awakened. (*TTL*, p. 411)

If he came out of hiding, his red hair would identify him as Prentice, the escapee, and 'muskets would crack from across the river' (*TTL*, p. 493), while without his help Cunnembeillee and their son would drown:

When he heard her despairing 'Coo-ee-ee-ee! ... Come to me', in a flash he understood that, as well as physical freedom, he had attained the goal of ultimate freedom, that of being true to himself, of being able to make his own moral choice. He chose:

They have done me great wrong in the past, but this final wrong they shall not do to me - that for fear of them I should lie in hiding while my woman and my child drown before my eyes!' (*TTL*, p. 495)

With an answering yell 'full of defiance and a strange exultation', he rushed down to Cunnembeillee, conscious of 'an indescribable sense of conquest, a fierce and reckless joy', for he had triumphed over 'them' at last by executing a moral action which evolved not from any social code, but from his own integrity: 'Not until I chose did they find me, and not their cleverness discovered me, but my own free action!' (*TTL*, p. 494) Before the astonished group opposite, he leapt into the river and pushed the woman and child to safety just before a heavy log bore down on the tree trunk, and, crushed against a rock, with his ribs 'splintered like eggshell' (*TTL*, p. 496), he sank beneath the water.

This chapter has been concerned to demonstrate Dark's respect for human effort, endurance and courage as the individual strives toward the goal of fulfilment on the life journey. She presented a young doctor who risked his reputation in order to establish an ideal society; the British Governor of a penal settlement who endeavoured to found in a new land, not just a colony, but another England; and a convict who fought to achieve

freedom and plenty in the Australian bush. It has illustrated, too, Dark's consciousness of the way in which human beings, themselves, make the path of human progress 'crooked and perverse'.¹⁷ She presented commonplace leaders who encouraged the people to ridicule rebels like Nigel, and English administrators who frustrated Governor Phillip's efforts to develop the First Settlement, while, at the same time, she disclosed the jealousies and quarrels of local administrators which interfered with its smooth running.

Given voice here, too, are the novelist's protests at the limited outlooks which shackle human advancement to false social ideals, such as the misplaced patriotism which spurred Nigel's colonists on to destroy their own reformed society, while her Governor Phillip was shown to be unable to attain his full humanity because he had been conditioned to regard duty to his leaders as a true ideal. Ringing out above all can be heard Dark's remonstrance at a complacent, hypocritical society which, in preaching the law of God while practising the law of Mammon, permitted the cruel debasement of human beings, both black and white, thus stunting both social and individual spiritual growth.

Dark expressed her practical idealism with the claim that Nigel's 'idealist's dream' (*PC*, p. 124) was based on common sense and demonstrably viable. She suggested, also, with Phillip's dream of establishing another England in the new land, that idealists are prone to aim too high in setting a goal, and must be wise enough to accept that which is practically possible. With Nigel's resolve to face life and to experience its elemental joys, she illustrated that positive and exuberant attitude toward life, which, she indicated, is necessary for human welfare and progress. Regeneration after failure was implicit in his hope that human resilience would prevail and a better society appear in 'yet another reincarnation' (*PC*, p. 73), while with Prentice, who attained physical and spiritual regeneration 'in a land which had offered only death' (*TTL*, p. 494), she demonstrated the unlimited possibilities which rewarded the courageous wayfarer.

Here Dark presented the idea that Governor Phillip's human potential was limited because, 'bred and set in the mould of his times' (*TTL*, p. 373),

¹⁷ H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 24-5.

he was trained to act, in dealing with his fellows, within the limitations of duty. In the following chapter I intend to explore the various ways in which society applied this conditioning, as I focus even more closely on the nature of those obstacles which, Dark insisted, hamper human development.